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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

International cooperation and coordination for the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

In its resolution 55/44 of 27 November 2000, on the international cooperation and coordination for the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its fifty-seventh session on the progress made in the implementation of that resolution. The present report provides an account of what has been undertaken in the last two years by the United Nations system, the Government of Kazakhstan, and the international community for the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan.

* A/57/150.

** The submission of the report was delayed to allow sufficient time for the clearing departments to review and approve it.

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I. Introduction

1. The Semipalatinsk nuclear testing ground, which was inherited by Kazakhstan from the former Soviet Union, was closed in 1991. However, it remains a matter of grave concern to the people and Government of Kazakhstan owing to its pervasive and continuing effect in the region on the lives and health of people, and on the environment. The General Assembly recognized the seriousness of the situation in the Semipalatinsk region and adopted three resolutions thereon in 1997, 1998 and 2000.

2. In its resolution 52/169 M of 16 December 1997, the General Assembly called upon the international community to assist the Government of Kazakhstan in its efforts to meet the needs of those affected by the legacy of the nuclear testing site, the Semipalatinsk Polygon. To address the humanitarian, ecological and economic problems and needs of the region, a joint needs assessment mission of leading international and national experts prepared an integrated programme framework, consisting of 38 priority project proposals.

3. In its resolution 53/1 H of 16 November 1998, the General Assembly invited the international community, in particular donor States and organizations of the United Nations system, to contribute to the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region, and to pursue a consultative process for mobilizing the necessary support to implement solutions appropriate to the problems and needs, including those prioritized in the report of the Secretary-General.

4. In its resolution 55/44 of 27 November 2000, the General Assembly stressed the need for continuing international attention and extra efforts in solving problems with regard to the Semipalatinsk region and its population; urged the international community to provide assistance in the formulation and implementation of special programmes and projects of treatment and care for the affected population in the Semipalatinsk region; invited all States, relevant multilateral financial organizations and other entities of the international community, including non-governmental organizations, to share their knowledge and experience in order to contribute to the human and ecological rehabilitation of the Semipalatinsk region; and invited all Member States, in particular donor States, and relevant organs and organizations of the United Nations system, including the funds and programmes, to participate in the rehabilitation of the Semipalatinsk region. In addition, the Assembly called upon the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to enhance world public awareness of the problems and needs of the Semipalatinsk region.

5. The Government of Kazakhstan and the United Nations country team under the leadership of the United Nations resident coordinator and resident representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) initiated a series of actions through the institutional framework of the Semipalatinsk Relief and Rehabilitation Programme to coordinate national and international efforts aimed at restoring the health of the affected population and rehabilitating the region's environment, and to enhance the effectiveness of assistance provided to the people of the region.

II. Institutional framework for the Semipalatinsk Relief and Rehabilitation Programme

6. To better coordinate external assistance to the Semipalatinsk region, the Government of Kazakhstan established an Inter-ministerial Commission on Semipalatinsk, chaired by the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Commission consists of representatives from key government agencies, including the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Ecology and Environmental Protection, the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Ministry of Defence, and a number of important non-governmental organizations. The Inter-ministerial Commission meets on a regular basis and coordinates implementation of the national programme, as well as external development and humanitarian assistance to the region.

7. With the support of UNDP, a Programme Coordination Unit (PCU), which was originally established to coordinate the preparations for the Tokyo International Conference on Semipalatinsk on behalf of the Government of Kazakhstan and UNDP, was effectively utilized to coordinate donors' activities and implementation of an integrated Semipalatinsk Relief and Rehabilitation Programme. The Programme consists of 38 impact-oriented actions for relief and rehabilitation in five areas of concern: health; environment and ecology; economic recovery; humanitarian issues; and information and advocacy.

8. The PCU reports directly to the Inter-ministerial Commission, and provides continuous support to the Commission, and to government officials, as regards assisting with meeting preparations, briefings, and consultations with key multilateral and bilateral donors to raise awareness about the consequences of the nuclear testing in Semipalatinsk; and assists in mobilizing support for addressing the needs of the region and its population.

9. The Government of Kazakhstan is fully cognizant of the fact that international assistance must be supplemented by its own initiatives in order to make real changes in Semipalatinsk. In this regard, the Government undertook a health reform project funded by a World Bank loan; cleaned up underground water contaminated by air fuel from the military base in the region; and reinstated payments and allowances to assist victims of the testing. Following donors' humanitarian initiatives, local government and the business sector increased their support to orphanages, hospitals, schools and boarding houses. The Government of Kazakhstan is committed to the continued implementation of its programme for the benefit of people in the Semipalatinsk region.

10. The Government of Kazakhstan raised additional funding from the Aga Khan Development Network for further capacity-building to support the Semipalatinsk Relief and Rehabilitation Programme. Over the last two years, the capacity of government and local institutions, including Kazakh non-governmental organizations and social institutions, was considerably strengthened, to enable them to better administer action programmes and ensure that they benefit the people most affected.

III. Donor assistance to the Semipalatinsk region

11. As a result of the Tokyo International Conference on Semipalatinsk in 1999, more than US$ 20 million was pledged by the international community — the Government of Japan, the World Bank, the General Board of Global Ministries (a United States non-governmental organization) and the United Nations agencies. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Switzerland, Counterpart International, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies also pledged their assistance to the Government of Kazakhstan's Semipalatinsk Relief and Rehabilitation Programme. The Government of Kazakhstan and UNDP actively sought the support of international partners for the Semipalatinsk Relief and Rehabilitation Programme, with positive results. However, while pledges of some donors were met and programmes were implemented, pledges of some other donors have not been received. A description of progress made in the implementation of the programme during the last two years follows below.

A. Health sector

12. The health sector projects represent the most important component of the Kazakhstan Government's Semipalatinsk Relief and Rehabilitation Programme. As a follow-up to the Tokyo Conference, the Government of Japan is implementing a US$ 6.2 million project to improve health-care services in Semipalatinsk. As part of the project, modern diagnostic equipment, instruments and mobile examination vehicles have been delivered; training to the local medical staff has been provided; and systematic screening and diagnostic systems will soon be provided.

13. The World Bank completed its US$ 2.5 million health reform programme, focusing on training to local doctors, renovation of health centres, and supply of medical equipment. The above initiatives significantly improved the medical services provided to the population; however, more support is needed.

14. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO), pursuant to a preparatory study, are finalizing funding support (US$ 470,000) to undertake an assessment of reproductive health in relation to radiation exposure around the nuclear test site in Semipalatinsk. UNFPA also delivered medical equipment and conducted training for gynaecologists and family doctors on improvement of reproductive health in the region.

15. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is providing support for early childhood survival and development, child enrichment and young people well-being. These programmes are aimed at improving the nutrition system, perinatal care, safe immunization practices and creating an enabling environment for healthy growth of children in Semipalatinsk. UNICEF

also supports a Crisis Centre for Women and Children, and a Youth-friendly Health Education Centre which promotes a healthy lifestyle, youth participation in social life, and community empowerment.

16. The International Science and Technology Centre, the European Union (EU) Framework Programme and other foundations have been providing support for scientific research related to health and the environment in the Semipalatinsk region. This includes support to the Women's Diagnosis and Rehabilitation Centre, ultrasound and genetic research on pregnant women, and treatment of people exposed to radiation with antioxidants.

17. The General Board of Global Ministries finalized its programme aimed at improving health services in communities affected by nuclear testing and the subsequent closure of the weapons testing programme. The initial phase of the programme has begun in the village hospital of Karaul, which has suffered greatly. The aim of the project is to support community-based health services, family-centred primary health-care centres in the region, training programmes, provision of management training for health-care professionals, and leveraging of existing partnerships to mobilize additional resources.

18. The Swedish Municipalities' Association implemented a technical assistance project to develop both an emergency plan, and the capacity of staff in various organizations and appropriate local institutions in Semipalatinsk, as a contribution to a wider disaster preparedness project for promoting the safety of the population.

B. Humanitarian sector

19. In the humanitarian sector, the Government of Switzerland and the Swiss non-governmental organization HILKA (Hilf Kazakhstan) provided considerable support, amounting to US$ 800,000, targeted at vulnerable groups of the population — invalids, orphans, the homeless and elderly people. This support included renovation of accommodations for these vulnerable groups, renovation of kitchens and supply of kitchen equipment, upgrade of basic facilities such as supply of washing and drying machines, and improvement of sanitary conditions in the centres where these groups of people were residing. In addition to this, the Swiss assistance included renovation of the building of an orphans association; special equipment for children with hearing and visual disabilities; supply of computers to orphanages and boarding houses; and supply of furniture, medical equipment, clothing etc. A precondition of these building renovation projects was that local counterparts should mobilize some of their own resources to improve their living conditions. Local authorities and beneficiaries carried out their obligations in this regard. The Government of Switzerland and the Swiss non-governmental organization HILKA are considering further support to the vulnerable population in the region.

20. An Irish non-governmental organization, Chernobyl Orphans' Fund, provided support to selected orphanages, improving kitchen and laundry facilities, and providing food, clothing and basic medical supplies. The Government of the United Kingdom provided similar assistance to a school in Semipalatinsk and to a village hospital.

21. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, American Counterpart International Humanitarian Assistance Programme, and Internationaler Hilfsfonds continue to provide humanitarian support for Semipalatinsk. Most of the support is related to supply of food, clothing and basic medical equipment for local hospitals, the lone elderly, physically and mentally handicapped people, and children from low-income families.

C. Economic sector

22. The economic sector programmes are being implemented mostly with the support of UNDP. Jointly with local non-governmental organizations, UNDP is supporting women of the Semipalatinsk region through microcredit schemes. In addition to the ongoing microcredit programme, UNDP has launched three projects with funding support from the Japanese trust fund to assist the social and economic development of the local population. These projects are: (a) expansion of microcredit schemes for women; (b) business skills training; and (c) a small grants programme for non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations.

23. The objective of the microcredit project is to empower women of the Semipalatinsk region and to alleviate poverty by providing microcredits to entrepreneurs who do not have access to traditional

sources of financing. The business skills training project provides support for creating a dynamic and efficient small and medium-sized enterprises sector that can contribute to equitable economic growth, job-creation and income-generation in the Semipalatinsk region. The objective of the project of small grants to non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations is to reduce social suffering and the humanitarian crisis in the Semipalatinsk region by improving the quality of social services delivered by local non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations. A healthy non-governmental presence in the region will create a concentration of skills, help to drive grass-roots-based development initiatives, and lead to the mobilization of additional resources for the region, while multiplying the impact of those that already exist.

D. Environmental sector

24. In the environmental sector, a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-funded project is conducting a radiologic assessment of water and soil in the southern part of the testing site and around Sarzhal village in the Semipalatinsk region. The objective is to protect the local population from radiation-related risks. Further funding for radiologic assessment of the western (Karaganda) part of the testing site is under consideration by NATO.

25. The Government of the United Kingdom, having reached an agreement with the Government of Kazakhstan, finalized its programme amounting to US$ 750,000 for a land-use strategy project, which is intended to provide concrete guidance and practical recommendations for land use in the Semipalatinsk region.

26. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) organized a meeting to coordinate with its members the mobilization of resources and the elaboration of a structured plan for the further development of a radiologic assessment of the territory of the testing site.

IV. Coordination for further assistance

27. Sustained action is needed to further raise world public awareness of the problems and needs of the Semipalatinsk region, as well as to coordinate national and international efforts to enhance the effectiveness of assistance provided to the population of the region.

28. At the invitation of the European Parliament, a delegation from Kazakhstan comprising the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Governor of Semipalatinsk, and the UNDP representative participated in a special hearing on Semipalatinsk in September 2000. The special hearing was organized as a result of persistent and long-term lobbying of key members of the European Parliament on the issue of the Semipalatinsk tragedy by Hilfsfonds International and UNDP, with support from the Government of Kazakhstan. This was the first time that the Semipalatinsk issue had ever been discussed at a very high level in the European Parliament. The meeting generated awareness among members of the European Parliament regarding the Soviet legacy of nuclear testing in Semipalatinsk; its impact on the environment, health and economy of the Semipalatinsk region; and the assistance needed for rehabilitation efforts.

29. As a follow-up to the above hearing, the Minister of Foreign Affairs led a Kazakh delegation to the European Parliament in February 2001 to discuss cooperation on Semipalatinsk with the President of the European Parliament, leading European politicians, and heads of the committees and commissions of the European Parliament. About 100 members of the European Parliament took part in a seminar and exhibition on Semipalatinsk, which had been organized as part of the mission. The exhibition further raised awareness of the need for the European Parliament to work towards passing a resolution to provide specific assistance to Semipalatinsk. The special hearing and meetings are the first step towards securing tangible assistance from the European Parliament. To obtain broad and long-term assistance for Semipalatinsk, these meetings require sustained follow-up with the European Parliament by the Government of Kazakhstan.

30. Similarly, as a result of efforts by the Government of Kazakhstan, with the support of the PCU, consultations and meetings also took place with the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Islamic Development Bank, and the Governments of the United Kingdom, Ireland, Norway and Sweden to raise their awareness regarding the Semipalatinsk tragedy as a problem of global concern, and to support the Government of Kazakhstan's efforts for the human and

ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region. Sustained coordination and follow-up action are required with these donors as well as others to achieve the formulation and implementation of special programmes or projects in the region.

31. The United Nations system in Kazakhstan, through its common country assessment, and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework preparatory process will review its future joint support and interventions to address the needs of the region and of its population.

V. Conclusion

32. **The international donor community has given significant attention to the problems of the Semipalatinsk region and has delivered substantial humanitarian and development assistance to the affected population. However, the scale and consequences of the nuclear testing in the Semipalatinsk region are enormous. The population still remains exceptionally vulnerable to the economic, social and ecological challenges of the ongoing transition process.**

33. **As highlighted in General Assembly resolution 55/44, it is highly important to address the compelling needs of the affected population, as prioritized in the Government's Semipalatinsk Relief and Rehabilitation Programme and emphasized by participants at the Tokyo International Conference. It is only through the initiatives of the Government of Kazakhstan, effectively complemented by concrete support from the international donor community, that the people who were affected and who will continue to be at risk in the future can be helped.**